

Snakes Podcast Transcript

My name is Addison Fischer, I'm Peter Ostroskie, and I'm Max Heitner. And today we are doing our second pod cast. This podcast will be about snakes within the park. Max here is more or less an expert on.

M - Thank you Addison

A - Max, what do you do for state parks.

M - My title is an environmental scientist. I work at both Prairie City State Vehicle Recreation Area (SVRA) and Clay Pit SVRA. My job is a general land manager. I manage natural resources in the park, work on trails, environmental compliance, and things of that nature.

A - What are your qualifications for this position?

M - Education wise I have a Bachelors from the University of Michigan and a Master from University of Illinois. I have had a bunch of different positions in the environmental field from consulting firms to environmental NGO's, this is my first foray into the world of government.

A - Now onto the subject at hand. What are the different types of snakes in the park and how many different types are there?

M - There are four main types we see at Prairie City, the Terrestrial Garter snake, Gopher snake, California King snake, and of course, the Northern Pacific Rattlesnake.

A - What type of habitat do these snakes live in. So, people who are out here riding, can watch out for them better?

M - These snakes overlap a lot with habitat. The Garter snake you will see in more aquatic environment, closer to ponds, creeks, and wetlands of that nature. The Rattlesnake will typically be in grasslands or rock piles, of which you find a lot of in our park.

A - What are their appetites? What do they eat usually? How often do they eat?

M - Snakes for the most part eat rodents, like mice and vols. There is a show, Price is Right, where Bob Barker, and now Drew Carrey, end the show with "Help control the pet population, have your pet spayed or neutered." Snakes are basically like the most popular vet in town when it comes to rodents. They help control that rodent population.

A - I like that analogy, that's a good one. With each of these snakes, what should we do if we run into them, which ones are the poisonous ones, which ones should we be caution of?

M - First, enjoy your interaction with native California wildlife. A lot of people are not lucky enough to see some wonderful examples of native wildlife. So, enjoy your interaction, take a photo. But to stay safe, step away slowly, give the animal some space. If you're confident you have spotted a Rattlesnake and it is in a popular human used area, like a parking area or

bathroom, give a park staff some notice so they can move the snake to a more natural setting and avoid any negative confrontations.

A - Alright, so what do these Rattlesnakes look like?

M - So the Rattlesnakes do blend in quite well with the environment. They can range from brown, to green, with various different patchy marks, and of course they have the rattle, the buttons. Which can range from none at all, to, if you have a larger snake, up to about ten buttons. Of course, you have to use your ears and listen for that rattle.

A - With snakes in general, how are we able to recognize a venomous snake from a non-venomous snake?

M - It depends on the venomous snake. For the Rattlesnake, which is what we are worried about here, the snake it most often gets confused with is the Gopher snake. They both have patches on them that look quite similar. The best opportunity to tell the different between the two is going to be their rattle or buttons. If you see those, you have the venomous Rattlesnake, if you don't hear or see anything, it is most likely you have the Gopher snake.

A - Okay. Say we come up on a snake, we disturb it and it bites us. What should we do?

M - First off, there are very, very few deaths by the Northern Pacific Rattlesnake. Their venom is not as deadly as some other snakes around the world, or the southwest, or Australia. But, please do take yourself, or get a friend or family member to take you to the hospital. If you are here at Prairie City there is a hospital in Folsom that carries anti-venom. Whatever you do, do not try to cut or suck the venom out, that only causes more problems. If you just move swiftly to a hospital, they will get you fixed up right away.

A - Okay. With each of the four snakes are there any easily identifiable features that would let us recognize each one in particular.

M - The Garter snake has a yellow line that runs vertically down its back side. It is basically a dark black snake, with this yellow line. The California King snake, what is easiest to tell with that is it has this white ring right behind its head. Like we talked about earlier, the Gopher and Rattler both have multi colored patches, with the Rattlesnake having the rattle.

A - Okay. With snakes in general around the park is there anything else you think we should be aware of?

M - Sure. Just know I think snakes often get a bad reputation. Whether it is in movies, television, or even the Bible, serpents are a common villain for human society. But for California they are an important part of the native ecosystem and help keep things in line. You can find the beauty in anything, if you try hard enough.

A - Alright, so Peter you have been pretty quiet this whole time, do you have any questions for Max or anything our listeners should be aware of.

P - Yes, I know from riding in the park that some snakes will imitate other snakes. Is there any snake that will imitate the venomous Rattlesnake?

M - The Gopher snake looks like the Rattlesnake, but of the other three snakes in this park, none of them have the ability to rattle quite like the Rattlesnake can. So, if you hear that rattle, you can know you most likely have a Rattlesnake and you are in an area, like by the kids track or by the staging area, where other humans come into contact, please do get a park staff member to move that snake.

P - My other question for you is, do you have any snakes here that is your favorite?

M - Sure, I have to say my favorite is the California king snake, it is an impressive, can get quite large and it doesn't really look like any other snake in the area. So, when you come across one, which is usually only once or twice a season here, it's always a little bit special.

P - Nice. With the California King snake, I know they have special appetite for something. What's the special creature it eats?

M - Well, I believe the large ones will sometimes eat a baby Rattlesnake.

P - Cool. That's kind of a cool thing to know about.

A - So you have mentioned that if we run across one of these snakes that we should get park maintenance to come and remove it. What is that removal process like?

M - Typically what we do is, we have some kind of hooks, some like to use a hook product, some like to use like a claw, attached to a pole and we will grab a bucket. We will safely grab the snake, making sure not to harm it in the process, put it in the bucket, then relocate it to one of the buffer areas in the park, which humans do not occupy.

A - Okay. So, I think I just have one more question for you. What does Prairie City mean to you?

M - Prairie City to me means a place of balance, a place where we can provide off-highway vehicle recreation for the local community. We do not have people who come typically from five, ten hours away, but this place is very important to people, especially in the Sacramento metro area. We provide a place where people can ride, but where we can also balance that recreation with resource management programs by protecting our water quality, protecting our vegetation, and protecting the wildlife, including the snakes that make this place its home.

A - Alright, thank you very much. Once again my name is Addison, (P) and I'm Peter, (A) and today with us we had Max, who's an environmental scientist here at Prairie City.

M - Thanks again so much for having me guys.